

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

his fellow-citizens ; while Agnolino, the head of the family, although he had joined in the rebellion of 1374, had inherited the traditions of his famous father, Giovanni di Agnolino Salimbeni, who for so many years had been a power for peace in the State, and was ready to serve the Republic against all her enemies. Agnolino's widowed mother, the venerable Madonna Biancina Salimbeni, a sister of the lords of Foligno, had been for long the devoted worshipper of Catherine^ who was also in correspondence with Madonna Stricca, the wife of Messer Gino. It was probably at the invitation of these two ladies that Catherine intervened in the dispute, though she was doubtless glad of such an opportunity to pursue the same apostolic work for her divine Master and Bridegroom among the people of the contado that she had already accomplished, for so many years, within the walls of Siena itself.

Several of Catherine's letters to the Salimbeni have been preserved. Besides Biancina and Stricca, she was in correspondence with Agnolino's two sisters, the Countess Benedetta and Madonna Isa, both of whom were at this time widows, and whom she was persuading to enter the religious life.¹ To Benedetta, whose second betrothed had died before the wedding, and upon whom her family were urging a third marriage for political reasons, she wrote urging her not to give herself to the perverse service of the world, but to take the two rebuffs it had given her as a sign that she was called to be the bride of Christ, and advising her to enter the new monastery of S. Maria degli Angeli at Belcaro. And in a longer letter, on divine love contrasted with the love of men, she invites her to the enclosed garden of self-knowledge, planted in the soil of true humility. " I know," she writes to Agnolino, " that much evil has been said and will be said to you about the Countess, because she wishes to be the servant and bride of Jesus Christ. She and you would be very foolish, if she did not answer, now that the Holy Spirit

¹ In the *Cronica Sanese*, under 1373, we read: "Agnolino di Giovanni Salimbeni ne mandò a marito due sue sorelle di Dicembre. El Comune di Siena mandò gente a far lo' scorta" (col. 236).